Chapter 12

The Penetration of Islam into Mossi Country

Islam in the Land of the Mogho Naba

643 794 771 The Mogho Naba, like his subjects, is above all an animist, and it is hard to understand how he reconciles his fetishism with the complex dogmas of Islam and with the many interdictions of Christianity.

The Mogho Naba, however, is quite capable of being a Catholic or a Moslem on appropriate occasions and at the same time respecting the traditions of his ancestors. Thus, when the Christians celebrate Christmas, the emperor of the Mossi devoutly attends Midnight Mass. He keeps his cap on, however, just as the bishop wears his miter. In the same way he embraces Islam during the following three festivals: the moaghrem (the Mossi zembendé); Ramadan (nolokré, "to loosen the mouth"); and, finally, the zoulhési (the Mossi tabaski or kibsa).

797 Before describing how the Mogho Naba celebrates these Moslem festivals, we shall give a brief history of Islam among the Mossi and discuss the appointment of imams.

The Arrival of Islam among the Mossi

797 793 It was during the reign of Naba Doulgou, the twenty-third Mogho Naba [204] after Oubri, founder of the Ouagadougou dynasty, that Islam took root in the empire of the Mogho Naba, and it was at that time that an imam was appointed at Ouagadougou.

Naba Sawadogo, who succeeded his father, Doulgou, sent his children to the Koranic school. Many of them obtained a fairly good education there, and the eldest son, who later succeeded to the throne under the name of Naba Koutou, even became a marabout. The development of Islam in Mossi country dates from his reign, as does practice of giving children of the Mogho Naba Moslem names such as Saïdou, Mahama, Moumouni, etc.

191 Gambaga Naba (chief of a vast territory in the British colony
193 of the Gold Coast) was, as we have already seen [not translated], the father of Nyennenga, mother of Ouedraogo, the real founder of the Mossi empire. As is well known, any king tends to imitate an illustrious relative and to follow his lead in all matters which might lend him distinction.

This being the case, here is how Doulgou happened to install a marabout at his side. It is said that in addition to his many ministers the king of Gambaga had an imam whose duty was to settle all complicated matters. He was, at the same time, an intimate counselor of the king. Mogho Naba Doulgou, who ruled over a large territory and who felt that he was just as powerful as his ancestor, the king of Gambaga, decided that he, too, wanted to consult only an imam for certain affairs. The emperor had a friend [205] who was a marabout in the region of Zitenga and whose name was Moustapha. Doulgou summoned him to Ouagadougou and conferred upon him the title of Imam.

It goes without saying that neither the learning of this adept in Islam nor any of his other qualifications were checked and that he was not chosen by other marabouts. Thus, the Imam of the Mogho Naba is principally a court dignitary, just like the Ouidi Naba, for example, and, as such, his appointment involves certain barbaric procedures. This is why, after he has been given his turban and his burnoose (insignia of chiefdom) he is invited to a house called surbinda. In this sacred place he is handed a
[272] gourdful of a loathsome beverage, tibo, a mixture of human and animal blood, which all canton chiefs, all ministers, and all court officials must drink at the time of their appointment to make them incapable of treason or lese majesty. The imam takes up the gourd and utters the following sacramental words: "I shall never, under any circumstances, betray the Mogho Naba; I shall come to his aid in time of war; I shall execute without question all orders received from my King," etc.... He then pretends to drink some of the beverage and hands it to the Ouidi Naba who puts the liquid back into the copper jar in which it has been kept for nearly a thousand years. Once these formalities have been completed, he is the Imam of the Mogho Naba. As is

797 the case for canton chiefs and ministers, this position is handed
793 down in [206] the same family. Obviously a son is not called to succeed his father unless he has been educated well enough to settle, to the satisfaction of the emperor, the few questions which will be submitted to him. In any event, the choice will always fall on a member of the family of Moustapha, the first Imam.

Celebration of the Moslem Festivals by the Mogho Naba

796 Moaghrem (the Mossi zambende). The moaghrem marks the beginning of the new year of the hegira. Every Moslem family must feast on the evening before the holiday. The next morning, that is, on the tenth day of the month of Moaghrem [Muharram], the sourata, book of the year, is read, and one learns the name of the saint who will preside over the destiny of the world for the next 360 days. Alms are stipulated. This festival, which represents a return to joy, solemnly commemorates the day on which the Patriarch, Noe [Noah] (called Nabi Nouhou by the marabouts), alone blessed by the Lord, first set foot on dry land after the flood which exterminated mankind. This was a return to life, and it was the Day of Fire.

The Mossi have never understood the meaning of the Moslem festivals and celebrate them in their own way. They did not understand that the "Day of Fire" meant a return to family life, to cooking food over a fire, but instead made up a curious custom which is more reminiscent of the taking of the Bastille. On that day they light torches, chase each other about, and burn each other. This sometimes results in [207] real injuries which fortunately are easily healed.

The Silmissi (Peulh of Mossi country) do rather better since they sprinkle themselves with cool water. This represents at least a wish for good health.

796 The tabaski (zoulhési or Mossi kibsa). In the old days the Mogho
643 Naba was required to go to the great mosque at Zoaghna on the day of tabaski.

Yarnaba, chief of the Yarcé (Dioula whose ancestor, Koanda, came to Mossi country during the reign of Koumdoumié, the eighth Mogho Naba), has the duty of sacrificing the cattle and sheep

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composed of two major groups of communities," Fortes goes on to describe this pattern succinctly:

> On the one side are those that claim to be descendants of immigrants from parts of the country other than their present habitats. On the other side are communities that claim to be the autochthonous inhabitants. . . . Many of the immigrant communities claim descent from forbears of the Mampuru ruling stock. Though now wholly amalgamated with the alleged aboriginal inhabitants, they have certain ritual observances and a system of chieftainship similar to those of the Mamprusi. . . . The institution distinctive of the autochthonous communities is the office of "Custodian of the Earth." This ritual office, involving priestly functions in connection with the cult of the Earth, is found among many West African peoples from the Senegal to the mouth of the Niger. In the Voltaic region it is the exclusive prerogative of the autochthonous communities.[2]

The inhabitants of the Yatenga at the time of the arrival of the Mossi were the Kurumankobe, or Fulse, as they are called by the Mossi. Their descendants recognize their indigenous origin but have become almost wholly acculturated to the Mossi. While most Mossi bear the sib name Wedraogo and maintain political control in the Yatenga, the descendants of the Kurumankobe usually have the sib name Savadogo and are excluded from the exercise of political authority. They have retained the custodianship of the earth, and the elders of their lineages and sibs are the Mossi's *Tenga Soba namba*, their "earth custodians," charged with propitiating the supernatural forces of nature.

POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

The present king of the Yatenga, the *Yatenga Naba*, is a lineal descendant of the first ruler, Naba Yadiga. The members of the lineage of the king are called "those who maintain themselves upon us" (*riim namba*). Directly subordinate to the authority of the Yatenga Naba are his four grand ministers, each of whom has authority over a particular province (*solum*) of the Yatenga.[3]

The province over which each of the grand ministers presides as lord is divided up into a number of cantons (*tense*), each of which is ruled by a chief who is the central political authority both of the village in which he resides and of the villages within the canton. Like the province, the concept of the canton is not precisely territorial. Some villages may owe

[1] Meyer Fortes, *The Dynamics of Clanship among the Tallensi* (London: Oxford University Press, 1945), p. 6.

[2] These provinces refer not only to geographical areas of the kingdom but to particular categories of the population. For example, the *Balum Naba* has direct authority over the southern regions of the Yatenga and indirect authority over the cantons of Riziam and Zittenga, political entities which have never fully recognized the central authority of the *Yatenga Naba*. This same minister is also especially charged with maintaining liaison with certain of the more important earth custodians throughout the Yatenga.

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769 destroy the yield. And, depending on his attentions to them, they can give or take away the good health necessary to carry him through the arduous activity of the rainy season when work is hardest, the granaries nearly empty, and food in short supply. Separate ancestral spirits look out for different aspects of the well-being of the individual. Satisfying their various sacrificial requirements is both expensive and time-consuming, but their good will is essential to the success of the farmer, and it is in his own best interest to be attentive to their needs.

THE EARTH CUSTODIANS

793 A close relationship exists between the control of the water supply upon which the agricultural economy depends and the authority of the 776 earth custodians in their role as intermediaries with the several manifestations of Wennam, the Mossi deity. The deity itself is somewhat aloof from the affairs of men, but through his specific manifestations and with the intercession of the earth custodians (*Tenga Soba namba*), descendants of the indigenous inhabitants of the Yatenga, the individual propitiates Wennam in order to control the various forces of the natural and supernatural environment upon which the success of his economic or social endeavor is dependent. Tenga Wende, his terrestrial manifestation, and Tido Wende, which gives life to the vegetable kingdom, are the aspects of Wennam which are most frequently evoked; but Siguiri Wende, the deified first ancestor of the Mossi; Ki Wende, the millet god; and Saga Wende, the rain deity, are also frequently called upon for help.

793 Each Mossi village in the Yatenga is divided into one or more areas, each of which is in the "command" of one of the village earth custodians. [36] Each of these areas contains both the dwelling of the Savadogo lineage of the earth custodian and the residence and farmlands of various "true" Mossi lineages. The head of each lineage maintains the good will of the terrestrial manifestation of the deity through the intercession of the earth custodian who "commands" his land. In some instances a lineage may own land under the authority of two different earth custodians; in this case offerings must be made at the shrine (*tenga*) of each.

793 The good fortune which may be secured through obeisance to the 782 terrestrial manifestation of the deity (Tenga Wende) involves both sacrifices and gifts of money to the earth custodian and abstention from acts offensive to the earth. For example, sexual intercourse may take [833 place only in a private courtyard or within the house. Violation of this 783] rule defiles the land and must be expiated through a special sacrifice and the payment of a fine to the earth custodian. Any lost object found in the 778 public way or in the bush is in the custody of the earth deity and must be turned over to the earth custodian to await the inquiry of the proper owners. If such objects are unclaimed, they are given to Tenga Wende

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by being placed on his altar, where they become part of the earth symbols (*tiinse*). As a result, these altars are piled high with old sardine cans, bicycle parts, remnants of clothing, unusual stones and scraps of metal, baskets, wooden implements, and weapons, which are left there to decompose slowly and return to the earth. Travelers in a strange village need never fear that their property will be stolen if they deposit it near the altar of the earth custodian.

When a farmer wishes to clear a part of the bush which has previously been unused, he must first ask permission of the earth custodian and make a present to the earth deity. If he wishes to use the land again the following year, the request and the gift must be repeated. Such a field may be passed on to his descendants, who have a right to the land so long as they acknowledge each year the authority of the earth custodian. If a new well is to be dug, his authorization must be requested, and his advice may also be asked for the proper place to seek water. The wise Mossi farmer consults the earth custodian frequently about his agricultural activities. He also reports anything that he may have done to alter the condition of his farmlands or the surrounding bush, not because each individual act is of such great importance, but because maintaining good relations with the custodian of the earth is in the interest of his own economic security.

OTHER ASPECTS OF RELIGION

Other descendants of the original inhabitants of the Yatenga, the Bogoba, are especially charged with the propitiation of Tido Wendé, the vegetal manifestation of Wennam. In addition to the many manifestations of Wennam and the complex organization of priests and ceremonial designed for his propitiation, many other forces inhabit the unseen world of the Mossi. Indeed, to the observer their number and variety might at first seem to be almost as great as the number of Mossi with whom he may discuss these beings. Each man's description of these supernatural beings varies in terms of his subjective reaction resulting either from direct experience of them or from stories he has heard concerning their behavior. In contrast to Wennam, whose disposition is essentially benevolent so long as he is properly propitiated, these lesser supernatural beings are more frequently malicious and always more difficult to control. Perhaps for these reasons they are not worshiped. The Mossi's concern is not to propitiate them but to neutralize their evil intentions by the use of protective charms (*tim*).

The "bush," the unused land lying beyond the farms, is the least-known aspect of the Mossi natural environment. This is especially true of those far areas of the bush where even the authority of the earth custodians does not extend and where unknown spirits dwell. For although the

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Tenga Wende of the desire for a good growing year and gives each girl a small part of the wet earth near the shrine; this represents the now sanctified soul (*shiga*) and is placed under the granary from which the millet seeds for the new crop will be taken.

Then those who possess land controlled by the earth custodian organise a hunt for his benefit. The following day, the earth custodian visits each lineage which possesses fields in areas of the bush under his custodianship. He is given calabashes filled with millet gruel, which he pours as a libation on the earth, asking Tenga Wende to grant good health, heavy rains, and a successful harvest to the household. As the libation is poured, the women try to catch a little in their own calabashes of gruel, which they then pour as their sacrifice. Because the millet from the granaries of good harvests is lucky, other women want to try to catch a little of it in their own offerings; thus the libations spill from one calabash into another as they fall on the earth.

The second moon is called "Bega" after the ceremonial which coincides with the first labor in the fields, the clearing and burning which precedes planting. After making a sacrifice at his own altar, the earth custodian goes to the residence of the neighboring priest (*Boga*) specifically charged with the propitiation of the vegetal manifestation of the deity. This visit symbolizes the interdependent relationship of the two priests and the supernatural powers which they control. The *Boga* then repeats the libations made during the previous ritual, but this time the offerings of millet gruel are made to Tido Wende, the force which gives life to the plants, rather than to the earth.

A sacrifice to Pogo Wende, the specific manifestation of Tenga Wende which guards a farmer's fields, is usually made after they have been cleared and prepared for planting. Either before or after the sowing of the first seeds, the farmer asks the earth custodian to sacrifice a sheep or a goat to the field deity, requesting good health, heavy rains, and a rich harvest. This sacrifice (*Pogo Mande*) is the final aspect of the ceremonial preparations for the new economic cycle. It is designed to enlist the benevolence not only of Pogo Wende but also of the twin spirits which inhabit the field. If the twins are well disposed toward the farmer, they will protect the soul (*ki shiga*) of his millet stand from the twin spirits from neighboring fields who might try to steal it. Like the ancestral spirits, the twin spirits send a high wind into a field, blowing the ripening grains from the stalk and liberating their "souls" (*shiise*), which are then captured to enrich the spirits' own fields.

The third moon of the year is called "Cundiba Bega." The fourth, which usually corresponds with the European month of June, is called "unaccompanied" (Quizale), referring to the fact that no ceremonial is observed during its phase. The hard work in the fields is begun at this

535 while the ouango are singing will surely die within the year. (The
532 ouango sing at the funeral ceremonies of important personages, at the
575 second ceremony performed a month or a year after the burial)
The masks of the ouango are made in the greatest secrecy. They have to be carved out of a single piece of wood, and the man who is making one must not be seen as long as his task has not been completed.

535 "In our opinion it would be most interesting to try and study
575 the ouango and their customs more closely than we succeeded in
171 doing. We believe, indeed, that theirs is a very old institution
174 antedating the arrival of the Mossi in the Volta basin, an institution which they found among the peoples they conquered and which they preserved, no doubt because they did not dare fight it. Ouango are to be found throughout Gourounsi territory, and the dou noticed by Binger among the Bobo would seem to have the same origin. The dancers with totemic masks who appear in some of Desplagnes' photographs are quite similar to the Mossi ouango."

The Mossi ouango are thus no different from the Bobo dou, the Khassonké mamadiombo, the Habé and Bambara namakoro, the Malinké dokho, the Landouman /Landuma/ simo, etc.

773 The Earth chief or Tensoba is also part of the Mossi priestly
174 organization. We are already familiar with Earth chiefs, whom we encountered among the Gourounsi. They exercise no political authority in the village, but they are entrusted with the performance of sacrifices to the Earth and to other local divinities.

The presence of those Earth chiefs among the Mossi is no doubt to be explained by the superposition of the conquering group over the conquered group. When the Mossi invaded and conquered the country, they placed their own men at the head of all the villages and all the cantons in the course of conquest, /595/ to ensure the submission of the vanquished population. They never felt, however, (and they hold this in common with the rest of West Africa) that they were themselves qualified to offer sacrifices to the Earth and other divinities of the place. Only the vanquished, former owners of the latter and on good terms with it, were qualified to do this. The former autochtonous political chief thus naturally became a religious chief under Mossi authority. We have already seen that the Moro Naba

793 never offers sacrifices himself to the Earth at Ouagadougou, nor does
174 he have them offered by the Gandé Naba, his minister of religion. He entrusts with this task the Ouagadougou Naba, who is a grandson of the autochtonous inhabitants and thus favorably regarded by the local divinities. Similarly, when the Moro Naba sacrifices to the hillocks surrounding Ouagadougou, he entrusts the local chief with the offerings and the physical sacrifice. Now, what the Moro Naba still does at Ouagadougou was no doubt done by other Mossi chiefs throughout the land after conquest, once the submission of the autochtonous inhabitants had been ensured by force of arms. Hence, the institution of the Tensoba.

One might object that Earth chiefs are also to be found in Gourounsi territory, although the Gourounsi are independent. We know, however, that the present-day Gourounsi cantons were not the achievement of the Gourounsi themselves but of minor Mossi dynasties established in the territory. Under the circumstances, the same substitution of conquering chiefs for conquered chiefs has occurred there as in Mossi territory, with the same consequences.

793 "The Tensoba," says Marc, p. 157, "whose title means 'Master of the Earth,' stands in opposition to the naba who is a military chief....

"The Tensoba is the indispensable mediator between the ancestors and their living descendants. It is he who conducts the funeral ceremonies and who decides on the honors to be rendered on the Day of the Dead. It is to him that one appeals in case of an epidemic or any public misfortune, since misfortunes are always due to the evil inclinations of ancestors that must be allayed."

793 /596/ Actually, the institution of the Earth chief does not strip
643 the village and canton chiefs of all religious powers. In some areas,
839 as Marc pointed out, the Earth chiefs have gradually vanished, and
778 the political chiefs have become religious chiefs as well. They per-
[431] form sacrifices on the bara's advice, without failing to make a gift of some sort (100 or 1,000 cowries) to the latter also. By the same token and up to a point, the Moro Naba is invested with a religious character and with religious attributes. It is he, as we have already seen, who orders the performance of sacrifices to the Earth, to the hills. Every year during the dry season, he has a donkey sacrificed to Naba Koutou, a former Moro Naba, in the hut where the latter is buried. Prior to our occupation it was a eunuch who performed

793 the sacrifice and killed the donkey. He also slit the throat of a
643 horse, a beef, and a sheep. (This eunuch in charge of guarding the
839 tomb was called by the name of Naba Koutou, and in a way per-
778 petuated the deceased Moro Naba. He was granted special privi-
leges. If a man who was condemned to death ran away and reached
the tomb, he was safe but became the eunuch's slave. Similarly,
[567] a captive who ran away from his master gained his freedom from the
latter if he reached the grave, but became the slave of Naba Koutou.
Finally, at that time, it was forbidden to ride by the hut on a donkey.
Naba Koutou would seize the donkey, or at least demand a ransom
in cowries before returning it. This applied to any animals who ran
astray near the tomb. The tomb still exists nowadays, along with
the Naba Koutou who watches over it, but the latter no longer enjoys
the same privileges.)

● 793 We saw earlier that the Moro Naba had a sort of minister of the
645 cult in the person of the Gandé Naba, high priest and sacrificer.
There was also the Pouy Naba, or chief of the fetisheers, whose
function was probably to mediate between the Mossi bara and
timisoba as a whole and the central authorities.

782 Let us close this study of Mossi religion, which incidentally is
quite incomplete and a mere outline, with a few words on the human
sacrifices that were performed /597/ in the territory prior to our
occupation, and a few words on circumcision as well.

782 "Human sacrifices," says Marc., p. 156, "definitely took place
766 among the Mossi up to the time when we occupied the territory.
Whenever a Moro Naba died at Ouagadougou, one of his wives and
one of his horses were sent to Gambaga in order to be sacrificed on
the tomb of Ouidiraogo (?) who is regarded as the mother of the first
Moro Naba. Soon after the occupation of Ouagadougou by the French,
782 the dethroned Moro Naba, Boukary Koutou, ordered the sacrifice of a
754 black rooster, a black goat, a black donkey, a black beef, and a
black slave on one of the mountains overlooking the White Volta.
This, it seems, was bound to cause the immediate death of the new
Moro Naba enthroned by Voulet."

304 As for circumcision, the Mossi circumcise boys and excise girls.
Boys are circumcised when they are from eight to twelve years
old, and thirty or forty of them are circumcised at one time. The

643 763 [645] [793] the Tansoba, the members of the royal sub-lineage, and the district chiefs. The Tengsoba of the Ouagadougou area was also notified. Because he was a descendant of the aboriginal Ninisi population that "owned" the land, he supervised the burial ceremony.

[701] The Mogho Naba's death was kept secret, and no mourning was allowed until the Crown Prince had arrived at the capital and the Tansoba had recruited an army to protect the realm against would-be usurpers of power. Then the cry was raised in the palace, to reverberate throughout the land, 643 that "the fire had gone out." Once the ruler's death had been announced, 764 the country was plunged into an interregnum, which was characterized by 669 ritual and often by actual anarchy. The people in the towns immediately looted the markets and stole their neighbors' goods; the prisoners and captives in stocks were released by their guards; the nakomce in all the territories, districts, and villages subjected the local populations to robbery and pillage; and the members of the monarch's babissi began their intrigues for power. The traditional sanction for this anarchy was that only when people suffer during the breakdown of political control do they really appreciate the sovereign's role. The Mossi declare (with some truth) that no one was safe during the interregnum. However, as we shall see, the ruler was symbolically kept alive, and the country was never without effective political leadership.

766 644 643 When the Tengsoba arrived at the palace, he was joined by five hereditary funeral chiefs: the Razany'tengsoba, the Tampouy Naba, the Benghin Naba, the Toghin Naba, and the Tanghin Naba. In the ceremony that followed, he gave permission for the royal grave to be dug. Meanwhile, the ruler's body was prepared for burial in the traditional manner by his female relatives and laid in state in the zongo. These women kept vigil over the body, shouting and weeping. Only the five ministers of the realm and the male members of the ruler's babissi were allowed to pay homage to the corpse within the zongo. All other mourners had to pay their respects to the monarch's eldest daughter, who, as Napoko, was dressed in the dead sovereign's clothes and sat in his place before the zongo. As her father's symbolic representative, she held daily court and received greetings and homage from all visitors until a new ruler was chosen. The drummer who sat by her side declared to all visitors, "You say that the Mogho Naba is dead! Well, who is that sitting there? Tell me! Is that not the Mogho Naba?"

766 643 [782] The ruler was buried the day after he died, at the end of an elaborate ceremony. Libations were poured out to the ancient rulers, and sacrifices made to them. All the important officials and members of the royal mini-

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to the control of his brother at Nobere. The other district, still called Vooko but now half its former size, was given to a descendant of its deposed ruler. The relationship between these two rulers and the Nobere Naba was that of vassals and lord. They did not stand up in the presence of the Nobere Naba, but knelt or sat on the ground and uncovered their heads in respect to him. The Nobere Naba traditionally appointed the village chiefs in the Vooko and Nobila districts; however, he sometimes granted that right to the two district chiefs. Furthermore, the traditional provincial administrator could not transmit any orders to those two district chiefs without first notifying the Nobere Naba. In their everyday affairs the two chiefs were autonomous, but the Nobere Naba could challenge and countermand all their actions. Actually, he did seem to exercise greater control over Vooko than over Nobila. One may even say that the relationship between the Nobere district chief and the Vooko chief was like that between the Mogho Naba and his district chiefs, and that the relationship between the Nobere Naba and the Nobila Naba was comparable to the one between the Mogho Naba and the Dimdamba. We have seen that the Dimdamba claimed equality with the Mogho Naba because of their alleged descent from a putative common ancestor. The Nobere Naba was actually more closely related to the Nobila Naba than to the Vooko Naba, and his behavior toward them reflected this fact. In both cases, the relationships involved were determined by the concept of joint possession of the nam by the ruling family.

A district chief was not required to notify his superior when he wished to confer the nam upon a village chief. In this choice he was completely autonomous and subject only to tradition. The fact is that on the district and village levels, traditions were more frequently modified in the face of practical political and socio-economic considerations. This occurred primarily because the district chief had closer relations with persons who possessed goods and services or who controlled them directly than did the chiefs on higher levels. Secondly, he was often under great temptation to allow presents or bribes to affect his choice of subordinate chiefs.

When a Tenga Naba died, the district chief permitted control of the village to revert to its Tengsoba. If there was none, the village was "given" to the eldest man among the aboriginal Ninisi lineages or to the eldest member of the ruling lineage segment. However, none of these persons was considered anything but a trustee of the village, and even when the trustee was a potential candidate for the nam, the Mossi did not feel that this man had any advantage over his competitors. Whoever held control of the village was held responsible for its affairs by the district administrator until the new chief was elected.

Competition for chieftainship on this level was very keen because of the

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The district chiefs did not often exercise their rights over fruit trees in the weogho, as the wasteland in their districts was called. If a villager went into the weogho and collected fruit or wood from the chief's trees, he surrendered only part of it to the chief. On the other hand, if he received permission from a district chief to farm in the weogho, he was obliged to gather and send to the chief the fruit on any valuable trees. A district chief sometimes granted the rights over certain fruit trees in the inhabited areas to specific families or individuals, for personal reasons or as a reward for services. In such cases, the chief forfeited his rights to these trees, but retained his rights to the others.[22]

District chiefs also controlled all the resources of creeks and pools within their jurisdiction that were not sacred to certain aboriginal families, or which had not been transferred to specific persons. The aboriginal Niniti families always notified the district chief when they planned to perform their annual fishing rite to the earth deities. He, in turn, sent representatives to the ceremony, and they were given part of the catch as his share. Persons who were granted permission to fish in the chief's water holes gave him a substantial part of their catch, and even those persons who had private control of fishing places regularly did the same.

The district chiefs also had rights to certain parts of animals caught in their territories. This applied especially to animals caught with such traditional weapons as traps, clubs, bows and arrows, and spears. Men who had obtained flint guns and other firearms from the Ashanti or elsewhere and who had bought their own powder were not obliged to give the chief a part of their game, but it was always prudent to do so. According to a long-standing tradition, the tusk and legs of a slain elephant that were not resting on the ground belonged to the chief, and those that lay on the ground belonged to the Tengsoba in whose ritual jurisdiction the animal had been slain. But the district chief's secular power was so much stronger than the Tengsoba's sacred power that he usually took both tusks, leaving the Tengsoba only two legs. The district chief also received other portions of elephants and parts of all the larger animals killed in his territory. And when hunters in the district were successful in the chase, they usually gave him entire small animals.

Every village in a district contributed to the district chief's revenue by performing special services for him. Certain villages were responsible for keeping specific huts in his compound in good condition; others, whose lands bordered on the woods, had to provide firewood for his compound; and yet others furnished grass and other fodder for his horses. Many villages had the task of cultivating special fields and crops for the district chief.

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climax of this gift-giving came when the ruler sent the Bendere Naba about 19,000 cowries and a slave.[2] This ceremony terminated at nightfall.

The close of the Mogho Naba's Basgha heralded the start of similar ceremonies throughout his kingdom. The heads of the other Mossi kingdoms and the Dimdamba were free to hold their own Basgha when they wished; but the Ouagadougou ruler's own subjects, including the provincial ministers, district chiefs, village chiefs, and lineage heads, apparently were not. One reason for this, aside from respect for the ruler, was that the important officials' head wives had to wait for the yeast (*dabili*) from the Mogho Naba's beer before they could prepare the sacrificial offerings for their husbands' ancestors. This dabili went from district to district or to several districts at once, depending on whether the chiefs celebrated Basgha at the same time or successively. Thus, the dabili from the capital united all the wives of the royal clan, and made for both a ritual continuity in the veneration of all ancestors and a strengthening of religious and political bonds.

The Basgha ceremonies on the district level were much less elaborate than those held at Ouagadougou, but just as important. The district chief, too, had his buildings repaired and his grain distributed for sacrifices for the ancestors. A few days before the actual ceremony, he ordered the Gande Naba to pour millet water on the graves of recently deceased chiefs and to sacrifice chickens there. As in Ouagadougou, these sacrifices were offered to induce the chiefly ancestors to grant the villagers health, food, and children. Unlike the Mogho Naba, most district chiefs did not ritually hide from their ancestors for several nights prior to the ceremony. Some of them did change their sleeping place within the compound every night, and the court people always slept indoors during this period. On the night of the Basgha itself, however, the district chiefs did not sleep in their compounds.

As in Ouagadougou, the Pughtiema performed the main ceremony by pouring millet water as a libation to the ancestors who visited her hut. She was assisted by the Baloum Naba, who had possession of the namtibo. Apparently, the district chief remained in hiding and took no part in the ceremony. But he was the main figure in the morning ceremony, which differed little from that of Ouagadougou. In some districts the Tengsoba performed a public sacrifice to the ancestors. He was given the namtibo—sacred objects that had belonged to former district chiefs—and poured libations and sacrificed chickens to all of the chief's ancestors. He also prayed both to these ancestors and to his own on the chief's behalf, and beseeched them to grant long life and happiness to the district population. He also declared that the sacred objects would seek out and kill any enemies of the local ruler, wherever they might be. Once this ritual had been com-

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prepared sauce, and flung them in three directions to the waiting ancestral spirits. He then beseeched the royal spirits, the spirits of former provincial ministers, and the spirits of the ancient people (the Ninisi) to grant a long life to the Mogho Naba and peace to all the Mossi. He repeated the ritual with three morsels of meat and with the contents of a pot of beer. When he had finished, the Gande Naba picked up the food thrown to the ancestors and carried it away. He did not look backward for fear that he should see the ancestors and die as a result. The departure of the Gande Naba was the signal for the palace retainers to rush toward the food. They seized and ate what they could, spilling and wasting a good deal in the process.[5]

Meanwhile, chiefs and headmen held similar ceremonies in every district, village, hamlet, and compound in the Ouagadougou kingdom. District and village chiefs offered sacrifices to their ancestors in the name of their subjects. The sacrifices on the hamlet and compound level were more specific. Every grown man had to take a sheep, goat, or chicken to his elder and request that it be offered to the ancestors in his name. The elder sacrificed the animal and beseeched the ancestors to grant the petitioner good health, bountiful crops, and many children during the coming year. The women and children did not take part in the ritual, but they did participate in the general feasting that followed.

The festivities of the Tense lasted only a few days in the districts and villages, but in the capital it did not end officially until about four weeks had elapsed. At the end of this period, the Larhalle Naba gave the Mogho Naba all the cords that had been used to mark the coming of the Tense. A few days later, the chief Tengsoba of Guillingou, the native village of Oubri's mother, and the Tengsobadamba of other important ceremonial centers, visited the Mogho Naba in the palace courtyard. Here they all sacrificed white cocks and placed the blood and feathers of their victims on their ceremonial axes in order to "increase the power" of these objects. Later on, they were given cooked mutton, millet cakes, and other presents. Their departure for home later in the day marked the close of the Tense.

The religio-political function of the Tense is quite explicit, despite the statement by Dim Delobson, himself a Mossi chief (but also a convert to Catholicism), that "it is apparent that this festival has no outstanding features. Its sole aim is to make peace between the living and the dead, and, in the process, to allow everyone to enjoy the food."[6] Judging by the reports of old men who participated in the festival before it was banned, the people did have a good time and enjoyed the food. What is important, however, is that like the Basgha, the Tense served not only "to make peace

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between the living and the dead," but also to strengthen the political bonds between the Mogho Naba and his chiefs, down to the humblest elder of a Mossi compound.

In addition to the Basgha and Tense, the Mogho Naba of Ouagadougou appears to have offered another yearly sacrifice to Tenga. Each year, after the Basgha, the Mogho Naba, the Baloum Naba, and a large entourage reportedly visited a large earth shrine called Tantibo in the vicinity of Sabatenga to offer propitiatory sacrifices in the name of all the people. When the royal party arrived at Sabatenga, they were joined by the Sabatenga Naba and his Tengsoba. The group proceeded to the foot of the sacred hill, and here the monarch dismounted, took off his bonnet and shoes, and climbed the hill. He made the customary Mossi salute at the shrine and looked on silently while the Tengsoba sacrificed animals and poured libations of millet beer and millet water in supplication for the health and prosperity of the Mogho Naba and all his people.[7]

When evil befell Mossi country in spite of the annual sacrifices to the ancestors and to the earth deity, the Mogho Naba had to offer additional sacrifices. If the country was plagued by drought, the ruler went to an earth shrine in Ouagadougou itself, called "Kom be paspanga" (literally, "water is strong there"), for a sacrifice. Moreover, he might order all his district and village chiefs to perform similar sacrifices to the earth shrines within their territories. In Nobere district, for instance, the district chief went to the village called Barkago, where, standing barefoot and bareheaded on the hilly shrine known as Beta, he ordered the local village chief and the Tengsoba to offer sacrifices for rain and good health.

It is generally believed by the Mossi that when the French attacked Ouagadougou, the deposed Mogho Naba Wobogo made sacrifices to earth shrines. Tradition has it that he sacrificed a black cock, a black ram, a black donkey, and a black slave on a large hill near the White Volta River, beseeching the earth goddess to drive the French away and to destroy the traitor Mazi whom they had placed upon the throne. When Mazi died, the Mossi people believed that he had received his just deserts from the earth shrine for treason. The French believe that Mazi was poisoned.[8]

The district and village chiefs, like the Mogho Naba, were required to make propitiatory sacrifices to the earth shrines on behalf of their subjects. Before taking office, a district chief was ritually shown the major earth shrines in his territory, and he could not ignore their existence and their need for sacrifices. In a country with major local variations in rainfall and localized animal and human epidemics, the Tengsobadamba of stricken areas always called upon the local chiefs to help them propitiate disgruntled spirits.

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spirits. The chiefs could not refuse such requests, especially when the villagers were poor, because they were regarded as "fathers of their people." In some cases, however, district chiefs had to protect their subjects against unscrupulous Tengsobadamba who took advantage of local crises and tried to prey upon the villagers by refusing to perform the requisite sacrifices unless they received substantial gifts. The ensuing struggle was between the secular and the sacred; between the chief as a representative of the conquerors, and the Tengsoba as a member of the conquered group. It was always resolved in favor of the Mossi chief, who never permitted his Tengsobadamba the same privileges held by religious practitioners in neighboring societies.[9] The Mossi chiefs recognized that they needed the Tengsobadamba, and many myths recount how invading Mossi chiefs went into the woods where the Tengsobadamba were hiding to beseech and eventually force them to return to their districts so that sacrifices might be continued. On the other hand, the Mossi chiefs always insisted on the primacy of the nam over any other power. They employed the Tengsobadamba to intercede with Tenga for the welfare of their subjects, but they never allowed the priests to control them.

The coming of Moslems to the kingdom of Ouagadougou had little effect on the way in which the Mogho Nanamse used the traditional religious system to bolster their political power.[10] In fact, the Mossi rulers later used Islam and its adherents in the same manner as they had used the aboriginal religion. The Moslems first tried to subdue the Mossi in the fifteenth century by persuasion, and later by the jihad. Both attempts failed, but the Moslems finally entered Mossi country as refugees from Sudanese wars. Their fortunes waxed and waned, depending on whether they were befriended by the ruler in whose territory they lived. During certain periods, they were subjected to many restrictions and were forbidden by the Mogho Naba to recite their prayers in public places.[11] At other times, they were left free to practice their religion, and even succeeded in converting several Mogho Nanamse to Islam. Under converts such as Savadogo (ca. 1760), Islam spread into many districts and gave rise to such important local centers as Sakhaboutenga (Dakay).

The Moslems in Ouagadougou were represented at the court by their Imam. This person even received his badge of office—a white turban and white robe—from the Mogho Naba, and had to swear in the name of Allah and *Nabiyama* (the prophet Mohammed) to be faithful to him, obey him, and aid him in times of need. However, he did not have to drink the namtibo as suggested by Dim Delobson; nor did he have to observe such non-Moslem customs as drinking the millet beer the Mogho Naba provided for